

The significance of knowing preferred learning styles in primary foreign language learning

Research Project

Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês no 1º ciclo do Ensino Básico

March, 2017

Relatório de Estágio apresentado para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em Ensino de Inglês no 1º ciclo do Ensino Básico realizado sob a orientação científica da Professora Dra. Sandie Mourão e da Professora Dra. Ana Gonçalves Matos da Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas de Lisboa.

Dedication

To my daughters Laura and Andreia, in whom I find all my strength and motivation

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Sandie Mourão for her invaluable guidance, constant support and patience.

I offer sincere thanks to the school that allowed me to have my practicum and implementation of my research project.

I also owe special thanks to Dra. Vera Batista, my co-operating teacher for her indispensable support while carrying out this study.

My sincere thanks also go to my beloved family, especially my two daughters Laura and Andreia, who had to endure my constant absence in these last two years and my husband Pedro Pereira for his continuous support and encouragement.

I would also like to thank all the students who participated in this study.

Abstract

In an attempt to search for ways to help me as a teacher and to do my job in helping students how to learn a foreign language, this report describes a project which investigated how learning styles can contribute to that objective in primary education. For this purpose, a learning style questionnaire was administered to all 18 students in the study, to determine their learning style. Furthermore, a teacher's diary was kept to register any important events, reactions, thoughts, as well as weekly reflections for the supervisor. Afterwards, activities were adopted to meet students' preferences and thus enhance their potential for success. The results indicated that students have more than one learning style and it is thus important to vary activities to successfully reach all students' expectations. This is of great importance for me as a teacher, especially when I am selecting activities and planning lessons.

Keywords: learning styles, primary education, English as a foreign language, teaching approaches

Resumo

Numa tentativa de procurar novas abordagens que me ajudassem a desempenhar melhor as minhas funções como professora e que é o de ajudar os alunos a aprender uma língua estrangeira melhor, este relatório descreve um projeto que procura saber como é que os estilos de aprendizagem podem contribuir para este objectivo no ensino primário. Neste sentido foi administrado um questionário de estilos de aprendizagem aos 18 alunos do estudo, para determinar os seus estilos de aprendizagem. Adicionalmente, dei início a um diário de professor onde registei quaisquer acontecimentos importantes, reacções e pensamentos. Consequentemente, foram adoptadas as actividades para que melhor se adequassem ao estilo de aprendizagem dos alunos e desta forma elevar o seu potencial sucesso. Os resultados indicam que os alunos têm mais do que um estilo de aprendizagem e por esta razão é necessário ter vários tipos de actividades para conseguir alcançar com sucesso as expectativas de todos os alunos.

Palavras-chave: Estilos de aprendizagem, ensino primário, inglês como língua estrangeira, abordagens de ensino

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	4
Abstract	5
Resumo.....	6
Contents.....	7
Figures.....	9
1. Introduction	10
2. Literature review	11
2.1 What is a learning style?	12
2.2 Development of learning styles.....	12
2.3 Learning style models.....	13
2.4 Beneficial attributes of learning style theory	13
2.5 Controversial aspect	14
2.6 Summary.....	14
3. The Action Research.....	16
3.1 Context.....	16
3.1.1 The school.....	16
3.1.2 The classroom	17
3.1.3 The English Lessons.....	17
3.2 Methodology	17
3.2.1 Action research	17
4. Results and discussion.....	21
4.2 Initial observations and assumptions.....	21
4.3 Questionnaire	22
4.4 Reflecting on activities	24
4.5 Approach to planning and subsequent observations	25
4.5.1 Auditory activities.....	25
4.5.2 Kinaesthetic activities	26
4.5.3 Group activities.....	27
4.6 Final thoughts.....	28
4.7 Difficulties	28
5. Conclusion.....	30

List of References	31
Appendices	33
Appendix 1- Letter of consent to school	34
Appendix 2- Letter of consent to parents	35
Appendix 3- Letter of consent to children.....	36
Appendix 4 – Learning style questionnaire	37
Appendix 5 – Example activity – from coursebook <i>Smiles 4</i> (2016), p. 31	38

Figures

Figure 1 - Input and attributes in second language acquisition	11
Figure 2 - Schedule	18
Figure 3 - The survey results	23
Figure 4 - The students' learning styles.....	24

1. Introduction

Human beings are unique. This uniqueness manifests itself in our signature, in the way we dress, behave, think and learn. Learning a second language is a long and complex undertaking. Your whole person is affected as you struggle to reach beyond the confines of your first language and into a new language, a new culture, a new way of thinking feeling, and acting. Total commitment, total involvement, a total physical, intellectual and emotional response is necessary to successfully send and receive messages in a second language (Brown, 2000). The process of learning a second language is not the same for everyone. We all learn differently; some are faster than others, some like to listen to information, others like visual input and others prefer some sort of physical involvement. We call the various ways in which we like to learn learning styles.

I have always had a deep interest about the multifarious ways in which we all like to learn. My own experience as a student led me to this interest since I realized from a very young age that I liked learning in a different way from my colleagues. While my colleagues at school were happy with lectures, I always had the need to do things in order to learn. It took me more time to learn with the approach that many teachers took. This is why I was a good student at all subjects that asked for manual engagement.

Because I was conscious of my experience as a student, I decided that it would be interesting and useful for me as a teacher to discover ways to better help my students learn a foreign language. For this reason, I decided to research learning styles. Therefore, this project work tries to determine students' learning styles; and evaluate the significance of knowing a preferred learning style in primary foreign language learning for the teacher.

2. Literature review

Though children seem to have a natural ability for language learning, there are factors that affect that learning, especially when it comes to a second language. These factors vary from the input characteristics to which children have been exposed, to individual characteristics factors (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010). The figure below summarizes how these factors work together to influence child second language acquisition proficiency.

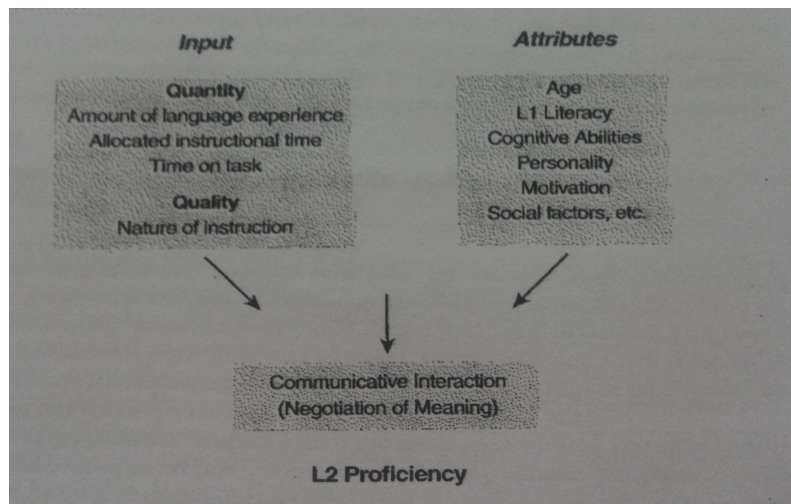


Figure 1 - Input and attributes in second language acquisition

Source - (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010)

As we can see, characteristics such as age, cognitive abilities, personality and motivation will affect how well they learn a second language. Learning style is one of the individual attributes that influence learning and its success (Wong & Nunan, 2011). Students have different strengths and preferences in the way they take in and process information. Some respond strongly to visual forms of information, like pictures, diagrams and schematics; others get more from the verbal form of spoken explanations. Some prefer to learn actively and interactively; others function more introspectively and individually (Felder, 1996). In fact, several studies related with young learners recognize the importance of individual differences such as age, motivation, personality and learning style when learning a foreign language. The Early Language Learning in Europe (ELLiE) study revealed common trends in young learners' attitudes, changes in their motivation and perceptions of learning (Enever, 2011).

A second study conducted in Croatia with a group of elementary school learners, aimed to investigate the relation between learning style preference and the success in language learning. The researchers, came to the conclusion that there was a significant difference between less successful learners and successful learners in the dimension of perceptual learning styles (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic). Students with lower grades seemed to prefer the auditory style (Rajić, Šegedin, & Kalebić, 2011).

Therefore, this review will cover the definition and development of learning styles, learning style models and beneficial attributes, as well as some controversial aspects on the topic. I will end this literature review with a brief conclusion expressing my own opinion on the learning style discussion.

2.1 What is a learning style?

Many definitions of learning styles have been suggested and all seem to imply that "learning styles are characteristic, cognitive, affective and physiological behaviours that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment" (Keefe, 1987). In other words, "learning styles refer to the way we like to learn"(Cohen & Weaver, 2005, p. 8).

2.2 Development of learning styles

The interest and research in what makes people different started with Jung in the 20th century, with the discovery of psychological types. Jung defended that the difference between people was in the way they perceived and absorbed information. The information could be judged either through the logic of thinking or the subjectivity of feeling. Jung's four functions – sensation, intuition, thinking and feeling exist in every individual (Arraj & Arraj, 1988).Jung's work influenced many researchers who looked for some understanding in human learning differences, such as Briggs and Myers who created the Myers- Briggs Type Indicator, which was a very useful tool in understanding the role of individual differences in the learning process (Schroeder, 1993).

The term learning style started being used when researchers tried to find ways to match teaching methods and instructional materials to the needs of each learner (Kirby, 1984).

2.3 Learning style models

Many learning style models have emerged (Coffield, Mosely, Hall, & Ecclestone, 2004), and those most strongly associated with a second language learning are related to sensory preferences, personality types and cognitive style. "Sensory preferences can be broken down into four main areas: visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic (movement oriented), and tactile (touch oriented)" (Oxford, 2003), which are often referred to as VAK learning styles (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic) in English language teaching. For example, visual learners prefer to visualize information before it is presented. Auditory learners prefer input to be auditory; they like to read out loud, to listen and talk with other people. As for kinaesthetic learners, they like to be involved physically in classroom experiences (Reid, 1995).

2.4 Beneficial attributes of learning style theory

The supporters of the learning style theory believe that when students know their learning style or styles, they can enhance the effectiveness of their own learning, thus making them aware of how they learn best. Knowing your style and using the right strategy can make learning, faster, more enjoyable and more effective. Learning strategies can be defined as techniques and efforts which a learner may use to acquire knowledge. In addition, strategies can be changed and taught to promote learning (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015). These authors propose the existence of two major groups of learning strategies; metacognitive strategies and cognitive strategies. Metacognitive strategies are more generalised, and have to do with thinking about and reflecting on learning. These encourage children to think about and to reflect on aspects of the learning process (Brewster, Ellis, & Girard, 2002). An example of this kind of strategy would be self-questioning and self-assessment, where students are taught to ask themselves questions in order to reflect on the content and process as well as to reflect on their performance. As for cognitive strategies, these are more task-specific and involve children doing things with the language such as organizing vocabulary into meaningful groups, reading for specific information, reading aloud to practise pronunciation and using actions, rhyme and visuals to aid memory (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015).

While learning styles are general approaches to language learning, learning strategies are specific ways to deal with language tasks in particular contexts. What is

important to realize is that once learners are conscious of their learning style, they can choose the best learning strategy to apply to different learning tasks (Oxford, 1993).

Moreover, learning style theory moves away from the ethnocentric point of view that others learn the way we do, and moves toward an increased realization and acceptance of other ways of learning (Reid, 1995).

2.5 Controversial aspect

If much has been said and written about the importance of learning styles, it is not less true that many studies and articles have been published to counter the legitimacy of these learning style theories.

Willingham is one amongst many of these authors who are antagonists of the theories of learning style. He has researched the field of learning styles since the 1940s and while acknowledging that not every student is the same, Willingham believes it to be wrong to categorize students, even if it's done in an effort to enhance learning. In fact, Willingham believes that categorization is only worthwhile if categories are accurate; otherwise they are meaningless. He points out the lack of evidence to support the learning style theory and suggests that teachers who cater to learning styles, especially those that already do some differentiation based on what students know, make their job much more difficult with no benefit to the students (Strauss, 2009).

Supporting this idea that learning style theory is not based on reliable study, Stahl (1999) found that many studies failed because of their difficulty to accurately assess children's learning styles. Nonetheless, learning style theory has an enduring popularity and according to Stahl, this has to do with the same phenomenon of the fortune telling "either way, the statements are specific enough so that they sound predictive, but ambiguous enough that they could apply to a number of situations" (Stahl, 1999).

2.6 Summary

Evidently, there is lively discussion about learning styles with strong arguments on both sides. Scientifically, learning style theory seems to be difficult to justify and those arguing for learning style usage could not produce quantitative facts or objective

data to support their position. However, those who argue against learning style seem to provide quantitative facts to support their position. To sum up, it is possible to question and disprove all theories, and some, despite all their lack of scientific data, are able to survive.

I can understand the arguments used on both sides of the learning style debate. If on one side it is difficult to provide objective data, it is no less true that knowing student's learning style can help orientate and exploit strategies to support better learning efficiency. For that reason, I wanted to see how knowing my students learning style preferences could help me in my practice and that is why I focused on the following research questions:

1. What are the learning style preferences of the students in the study?
2. Do students have one learning style or more?
3. How do students react to different kinds of activities?
4. Does my practice support what I discovered about my students' learning styles?

3. The Action Research

Action research aims to identify a problematic situation or issue, which the participants consider worth looking into more deeply and systematically. It can be done by teachers, students, managers, administrators or even parents (Burns, 2010). In the educational context, action research requires you to inquire into your own practice in order to solve a problem or simply improve your practice. In order to do this it involves the researcher going through a process of self-monitoring, which includes going through a cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Farrell, 2008). Within the second language education, action research can be very useful to help teachers become aware of their practice and become better in what they do. This is also true when one is undergoing a process of becoming a teacher. As the action research develops, the teacher grows with it; their findings allow them to be conscious of what is it they do, how they do it and how they can do it better in order to achieve their purpose. It was with this in mind that my action research was carried out.

3.1 Context

The participants in this study were from a 4th grade class in a private primary school, in Oeiras, Lisbon, Portugal. The classroom was composed of 18 children between the ages of 9 and 10, 10 boys and 8 girls.

The group is best described as very enthusiastic, respectful and motivated to learn English. Behaviour was not a problem in this group. There was one special needs student (NEE) in the class who had curricular adaptation.

3.1.1 The school

The school has existed since 1963 and operates in a two-floor house and its surrounding space. It is situated in a residential zone, close to the railway station and other residential areas. The school has nine class rooms - four for the first cycle, five for kindergarten, a gym and a playground.

3.1.2 The classroom

The classroom was situated on the top floor of the house. It wasn't a very big classroom, but it was well lit. It had two big windows which allowed light to come in to warm and illuminate us. There was a large black board on which teachers and students wrote with chalk. Tables were set in pairs in two rows with space between them, allowing the teacher to walk through. There was a small table and a chair for the teacher at the back of the classroom. The walls were decorated with maps and students' work.

3.1.3 The English Lessons

The English lessons were twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 15:00 to 16:00. I tried to be student centered in my teaching approach as much as my experience allowed, since I believe that students learn better and quicker if they have an active role in their learning process. The coursebook adopted was *Smiles 4^o*. It is divided into six modules. This edition of *Smiles* is quite recent, from 2016. It actually caters for learning styles, in the sense that throughout the book there are all kinds of different exercises that aim to stimulate visually, auditory and kinaesthetically. Also worth mentioning, *Smiles* had NEE worksheets for students with special needs.

3.2 Methodology

The methodology chosen for this study used both quantitative and qualitative tools. This way, data could be supported not only in my personal view of things as a result of my observation and reflection, but could have measurable results.

3.2.1 Action research

My action research started in the second semester of my master's by deciding which the topic I was going to write about. The actual data collection took place in the first semester of a school year and lasted three months from September to December. As is shown in the chart below, the action research is divided into four main stages: planning, acting, observing and reflecting. As suggested by (Burns, 2010), these are the four broad phases in a cycle of research.

		2016						2017		
		April	May	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March
Planning	Identifying and limiting the topic	X								
	Gathering information	X								
	Reviewing related literature	X								
	Developing research plan		X							
	Collecting informed consent			X						
Acting	Developing an action plan				X	X	X			
Observation	Collecting Data				X	X	X			
Reflection	Analysing data				X	X	X			
	Writing up results							X	X	X
	Sharing results									X

Figure 2 - Schedule

3.2.1.1 Planning

Bearing in mind that my action research is a result of a master's degree and it is going to be made public and available for others to consult, I had to ask permission from the school, parents and children involved in the study. This permission had to do with informing people that I was conducting research and giving them information about the research so that they could decide whether they wanted to be involved. A Burns, (2010) suggests, participants have a right to know about the purpose, procedures, possible effects of the research on them, and how the research will be used, and should not be deceived or tricked about the aims of the research. For this reason, consent letters were sent to school director (Appendix 1), parents (Appendix 2), and children (see Appendix 3), explaining what was going to be done in the research, but also informing them of their rights. Despite having formal consent from the children, I also had a conversation with them explaining what my research was, why I was doing it and that I needed their permission. I also explained that they were free to choose not to participate at any stage of my research. When asked if they had any questions the children mainly were curious that I was still studying and one of the students asked me until what age one studies. Fortunately, all children wanted to participate in the research and their parents allowed them to do so.

3.2.1.2 Acting

In order to accomplish my action research, I tried to obtain data from different sources to provide me with as much information as possible to confirm my research question. Therefore, I started a teacher's diary which I wrote at least once a week. Furthermore, I sent weekly reflections to my supervisor. I didn't impose a writing limit on my diary reflections, so it varies from just a few sentences to almost a page. I normally wrote the most important impressions after lessons and later at night or the day after completed my reflections with more time. These qualitative tools registered any important reactions, feelings, thoughts and reflections on what happened during the lessons.

As for the quantitative tools, I created a questionnaire that was applied once, at the beginning of my action research, in October. Students took the questionnaire home to get help from their parents. This questionnaire was created to determine the students' learning styles (see Appendix 4), which allowed me to have a global view of my students' preferred learning styles with a view to motivating them and getting them more involved in the learning process. This questionnaire was a result of research and adapting other online learning styles surveys.

Despite knowing the importance of piloting a questionnaire before applying it, as it allows the researcher to collect feedback about how the instrument works and whether it performs the job it has been designed for (Dörnyei, 2003), it was not possible to carry out this important stage.

3.2.1.3 Observing

Observation is not only a fundamental activity associated with action research but is also a requisite tool for scientific enquiry. Observation as a research technique has several advantages, among which is the fact that the study takes place in the natural environment of the participants, allowing them to act freely. The kind of observation that took place in my study was one of participant observation. It can be defined as the practice of doing research by joining the life of the social group or institution that is being researched. This offers a great benefit since it allows the collection of authentic accounts and verification of ideas through empirical observations (McKernan, 1996).

However, participant observation has the disadvantage of making it difficult to document the data and this is something I have often felt in my study. It is hard to write down everything that is important while one is in the act of participating and observing. As a researcher, one must rely on one's memory and on one's personal discipline to write and expand one's observations as soon as possible (Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, Guest, & Namey, 2011)

3.2.1.4 Reflecting

In this important stage of my study, I reflected critically during the weekly reflections I sent to my supervisor and in my teacher's diary, looking for answers to my research question. I also reflected on the quantitative results of my questionnaire.

4. Results and discussion

As I mentioned previously, the aim of my action research was to determine how trying to understand students' learning styles helps me improve my teaching. To help me answer this question the following research questions arose:

1. What are the learning style preferences of the students in the study?
2. Do students have one learning style or more?
3. How do students react to different kinds of activities?
4. Does my practice support what I discovered about my students' learning styles?

As a result, this section will be devoted to the outcomes of this study after the data analysis of the above research questions.

4.2 Initial observations and assumptions

Before the completion of the survey and in the first few lessons of the school year, my concern was to get to know students' preferences from their reactions to activities. I noticed that their motivation rose increasingly when I did activities where they had to get up, move and role-play. An example of this was the activity on recycling (6th of October), where students had three coloured bags at front of the room, one for paper, one for plastic and one for glass. They had to put items that they had brought from home into the plastic bags according to the material. They appeared to be concentrating more on what they were doing with this kind of activity as opposed to working with their course books only (journal, 07th October 2016). I also noticed that they liked to work in groups. I still remember the enthusiasm with which they played fortune-teller in groups of four (lesson number 5 on the 6th October). In this activity, students had to choose a number or a colour which led them to a picture e.g. a guitar. Students had to guess the school area where they play the guitar (the music room). The students really liked this activity, and asked me to do more of this (journal, 07th October 2016).

I noticed as well that there were no enthusiastic reactions to the activities that were done from the book. Their body expression changed completely whenever I told

them that they were going to play a game or I introduced an activity with a physical component.

Each lesson represented a challenge for me; trying to meet the student's expectations on the kind of activities they liked and hopefully helping them learn better. At this point I was eager to have the survey results and I expected them to confirm my first observations, but this wasn't the case.

4.3 Questionnaire

The main purpose of the "Learning Styles" questionnaire was to identify the predominant learning style of a 4th grade class in a private primary school, where my practicum took place. The statistical survey consisted of a questionnaire (Appendix 4) with five sets of three questions, randomly sorted, to evaluate the learning style trend of each child - Visual, Kinaesthetic, Auditory, Group and Individual.

The results of the survey showed, as seen in figure 3, that 92.6 % of the children tend towards a Group learning style and 70.4 % tend towards an Auditory learning style. On the other hand, 35.2 % show a Visual learning style, 22.2 % a Kinaesthetic learning style and only 1.9 % an Individual learning style.

Learning Styles Survey Results										
Questions			Answers			Percentages				
1 - Gosto mais de ler instruções do que ouvir a professora explicar.			1	3	14	0	5.56	16.67	77.78	
6 - Faço muitos rabiscos/desenhos durante a aula.			2		9	7	11.11	0	50	38.89
11 - Ver mapas, desenhos e figuras ajuda-me a aprender.			17	1			94.44	5.56	0	0
			Final Results			35.2	3.7	22.2	38.9	
2 - Entendo melhor os assuntos quando participo em representações			8	9	1		44.44	50	5.56	0
7 - Aprendo melhor quando tiro apontamentos.			3		2	13	16.67	0	11.11	72.22
12 - Consigo me concentrar melhor se petiscar enquanto estudo.			1	3	6	8	5.56	16.67	33.33	44.44
			Final Results			22.2	22.2	16.7	38.9	
3 - Aprendo melhor se repito as palavras que estou a aprender.			15	2	1		83.33	11.11	5.56	0
8 - Gosto de ouvir a professora explicar o que tenho de fazer.			15	3			83.33	16.67	0	0
13 - Gosto de ouvir música quando estou a estudar.			8	5	2	3	44.44	27.78	11.11	16.67
			Final Results			70.4	18.5	5.6	5.6	
5 - Aprendo melhor quando estudo em grupo.			16	1	1		88.89	5.56	5.56	0
10 - Gosto de fazer trabalhos de grupo.			16	2			88.89	11.11	0	0
15 - Gosto de estudar com os meus colegas ou os meus pais.			18				100	0	0	0
			Final Results			92.6	5.6	1.9	0	
14 - Gosto de estudar sozinho.			1		4	13	5.56	0	22.22	72.22
4 - Lembro-me melhor dos assuntos se estudar só.				3	2	13	0	16.67	11.11	72.22
9 - Aprendo melhor se trabalhar sozinho.				1	3	14	0	5.56	16.67	77.78
			Final Results			1.9	7.4	16.7	74.1	
Learning Styles - Labels			Learning Styles - Results %							
Visual			35.2							
Kinesthetic			22.2							
Auditory			70.4							
Group			92.6							
Individual			1.9							

Figure 3 - The survey results

Based on these results we can safely conclude that the class has a Group / Auditory learning style. The illustration below shows the trend of the children's learning styles.

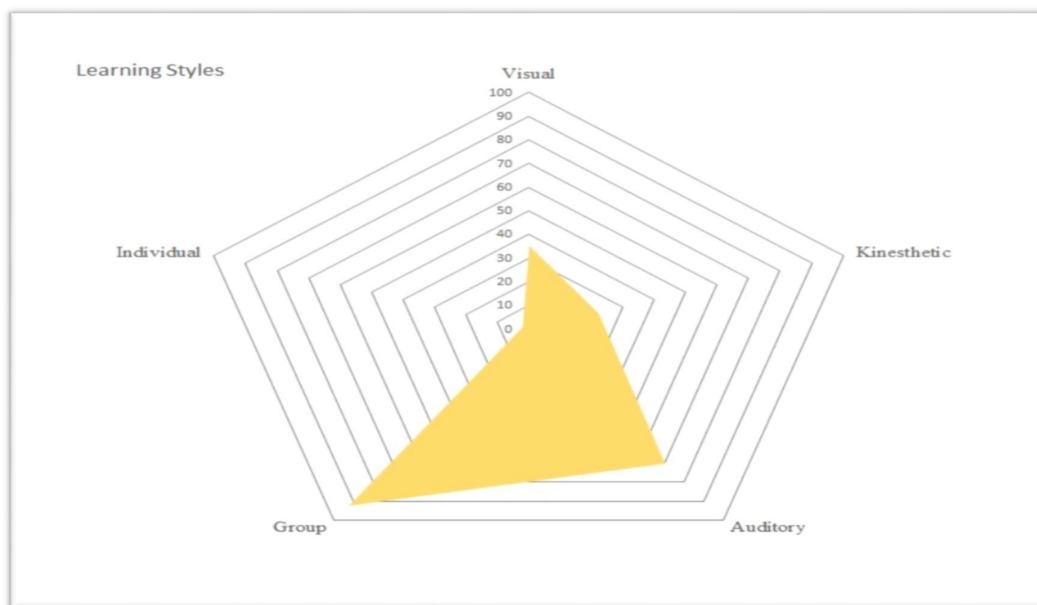


Figure 4 - The students' learning styles

We can also conclude, based on these results, that the children in this particular class do not have either kinaesthetic or individual learning styles. Furthermore, the statistical survey shows inconclusive results related to the children's visual learning style.

Although the survey shows a higher proportion of students who seem to have an auditory learning style, my observations had indicated that they are also kinaesthetic. In class, the students' behavioural response was more enthusiastic with kinaesthetic activities than with auditory activities. Therefore, the survey results were also a surprise to me. I expected to easily prove with measurable results what my first observations led me to believe. Nonetheless, this wasn't the case. The results were much more complex.

4.4 Reflecting on activities

To help students become conscious of how they like to learn I did an engagement VAK activity. The activity allowed students to revise vocabulary on the topic of home. This involved memorizing and writing down as many words as they could remember in three different ways. First, they had to listen to the words, second they watched images for a few seconds and third they could touch the items. In the end all they had to do was to see in which way they remembered the most words. I chose this activity to help the students understand the different ways in which we can learn.

After the activity I explained the three main learning styles and asked them if they had understood. Their reactions were expectable, since the only learning style they didn't really understand was the kinaesthetic. I then gave examples of activities that are kinaesthetic and when I asked them if they had understood, the answers were positive.

In my weekly reflection to my supervisor I said "Most of the students were auditory and visual and only one was kinaesthetic. So the activity confirmed the questionnaire ..." (reflection, 14th November 2016). However, I still find that though the results show that they aren't kinaesthetic, their physical enthusiasm for kinaesthetic activities increased whenever they were done. I remember how excited students were to touch the items and pass them around. I looked on their enthusiasm as a way to measure their success, but what the survey results showed was that this was not the right way of looking at it.

4.5 Approach to planning and subsequent observations

After discovering with the questionnaire results that the students' preference for an auditory learning style was stronger than that for a kinaesthetic or visual learning style, I began taking that information into consideration in my lesson plans. I tried to incorporate more listening activities. As the results showed a higher preference for group work, I also took that information into consideration and tried to have more group work in my lesson plans.

Despite the questionnaire results showing that students had less preference for kinaesthetic learning style, I still kept on doing kinaesthetic activities, because in my observations I could see that student's liked doing them.

Below I describe some of the activities that were done after the questionnaire results and subsequent observations of student's reactions to those activities.

4.5.1 Auditory activities

Since the results showed that they were an auditory group, I tried to incorporate more listening activities into my lesson plans. An example of this was one exercise from the student's book that I deliberately decided to use because I found it very suitable for their learning style. The exercise consisted of listening to sentences with prepositions

(in, on, under, near) and afterwards they had to colour the prepositions of the picture in the book in the right place (see Appendix 5), according to what they had heard. The student's reacted to this exercise with much more enthusiasm than if I had used a simple gap filling exercise (journal, 15th November 2016), which would not have had the same effect of meeting the students' learning style.

Another exercise that also met students' auditory learning style started as a visual activity and then moved into an auditory activity with listening and answering questions. Students were asked to look at a picture for a few seconds, and then the exercise they had to do was to ask to the colleague where the objects were, e.g. *Where is the red clock? It is on the sofa.* This kind of activity is not only cognitively demanding because students have to remember where the clocks were, but it is emotionally engaging because students want to guess it right. The activity allows students to develop speaking skills and at the same time trains their memory. "Guessing is actually a very powerful way of learning phrases and structures, but it is indirect because the mind is engaged with the task and is not focusing on the language. The process relates very closely to the way we develop our mother tongue. We do not consciously set out to learn it. We acquire it through continuous exposure and use" (Halliwell, 1992, p. 5). This is the sort of mentally engaging activity that Halliwell suggests teachers should use. I could see that students were very committed to what they were doing.

4.5.2 Kinaesthetic activities

Kinaesthetic students like movement; they need to touch and move. Activities with total physical response (TPR) are very suited to students with a kinaesthetic preference. TPR was created by Dr. James J. Asher, and it is based on the assumption that a second language can be learned in the same way as mother tongue. TPR tries to mimic these processes by requiring students to respond to commands, which in turn require physical movements.

TPR activities are very successful among students because they are fun, but for kinaesthetic students they are great because they imply movement. Songs are great TPR activities as they combine movement and miming. One of the TPR activities I did was a song about Halloween (27th October). Prior to the activity I hung some topic related words on the board, some of which were in the song and some that were not. I explained

that they were going to listen to a song about Halloween and that they had to decide which of those words on the board were in the song. After listening to the song twice as a class, we chose the words from the board that were in the song. I then added mime to the song and we all sang the song, combining song, movement and mime.

Another kinaesthetic activity that the students liked very much was when they had to talk about their likes and dislikes. The activity consisted of both saying what food items they liked, and also moving around the classroom touching the food item that they were talking about. This activity is based on the children's instinct and need to get up and move around. Again the process of learning is made more fun rather than serious and according to Halliwell (1992), indirect learning is important to successful language learning.

4.5.3 Group activities

An example of a group work activity that the students were very enthusiastic about, was a puzzle game about the 5 senses (20th October). The class was divided into groups of four and each group was given a sense (sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell). The puzzle pieces that belonged to each of the senses they had were not given to them right away; instead they were asked to come to the front of the classroom in groups, where there was a table with several puzzle parts and choose the ones that belonged to them. When they all had their pieces they were asked to complete the puzzle. As Halliwell (1992) suggests, games are more than a fun extra. They provide an opportunity for the real using and processing of language while the mind is focused on the task of playing the game. Games are a very effective opportunity for indirect learning.

Behaviour was actually a concern that I was expecting to have in this lesson, I even wrote that in my lesson plan that was sent to my supervisor. Nonetheless, after the lesson and in my diary I wrote how surprised I was that they completed the activity with such excitement, and that despite being a stirring activity it didn't cause behavioural problems. There was just the normal excitement and noise of a group activity (journal, 21th October 2016).

4.6 Final thoughts

The purpose of this research was to determine if knowing the students' preferred learning style helped me improve my teaching and subsequently helped learners learn a foreign language. Findings suggest that it was useful for me as a teacher to know my students' learning styles. This way I could better choose activities that suited their learning style. I was surprised at the survey results, since I thought they would only have one learning style and after I knew which one I would focus on activities that catered to it. Instead, the survey results showed that they have more than one preferred learning style. I confess it was a surprise to see that almost all the students like to work in groups and before this research I had a different perspective of group work. Like many other teachers who also tend to avoid group work in their classes, I also viewed group work as something that caused noise and confusion in the class.

This discovery made me think about the importance of having varied activities that use visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, group and individual learning styles.

4.7 Difficulties

One of my biggest difficulties in this research project was to create a survey for the children. It couldn't be extensive; it had to be simple and understandable for them to respond with sincerity and commitment. Before reaching my final version of the survey, I did two other versions: the first one had 25 questions and it was clearly too extensive for the children. Even though the final version was written in Portuguese, students revealed difficulties in understanding some of the questions asked. This was the case for the first question: "Gostomais de ler instruções do que ouvir a professor explicar" (I like to read instructions more than listening to the teacher explain?). When I went through the questions with them they all asked me what that question meant, and it was then that I realized that the results of this survey could be influenced by their misunderstanding of the questions. According to (Borgers, Leeuw, & Hox, 2000), children can be surveyed from 8 years old, but one should be careful with the wording since children at this age are still developing language and understanding. A comparative sentence such as the one I used in the questionnaire is difficult for students at this stage of cognitive development to understand. At this stage, children are very literal in the interpretation of

words, and experience problems with depersonalized or indirect questions (Borgers, Leeuw, & Hox, 2000).

Not being able to pilot the survey might also have impacted on the survey results. I'm sure that if this had been done at least some of the problems with the questions would have been overcome.

I was teaching while I was trying to observe students and this made it difficult to assess their confidence and enthusiasm, and might have even influenced my judgements on their reactions. Perhaps I could have interviewed students to get their feedback on the activities and this way my judgement wouldn't have been compromised by the teaching act.

The length of the practicum and the need to teach the entire curriculum set for the students by the educational system also limited me in my planning and in the activities I chose.

5. Conclusion

I think it is fair to say that my findings show that students can have more than one preferred learning style and that it is difficult to categorize them into one learning style. Therefore it is important for teachers to vary activities when they teach. All things considered, catering for all learning styles in the classroom gives all students the opportunity to be successful. This is acknowledging that there is no best way to learn, but instead there are many ways to learn. Variety is the key word for success.

Furthermore, this study reassured me that students do like to work in groups. It is true that they make more noise and in certain classes it causes behavioural problems, but on the other hand by collaborating with each other and helping each other they seem to develop. I now feel group work is something that definitely has to be included in my lessons. Sharing and collaborating is an important process of learning and one that is often disregarded by teachers when they choose activities for their lessons.

Also, this study gave me the opportunity to grow as a teacher through understanding my practice.

List of References

- Arraj, T., & Arraj, J. (1988). *Tracking the Elusive Human, Vol. I: A Practical Guide to C.G. Jung's Psychological Types, W.H. Sheldon's Body and Temperament Types, and Their Integration*. Minnesota: Inner Growth Books.
- Borgers, N., Leeuw, E. d., & Hox, J. (2000). 1, Children as Respondents in Survey Research: Cognitive Development and Response Quality. *Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique*, 60-75 N° 66.
- Brewster, J., Ellis, G., & Girard, D. (2002). *The Primary English Teacher's Guide*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Burns, A. (2010). *Doing Action Research in English Language Teaching: A Guide for Practitioners*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Coffield, F., Mosely, D., Hall, E., & Ecclestone, K. (2004). *Learning Styles and Pedagogy in post 16 Learning*. London: learning and skills Research center.
- Cohen, A., & Weaver, S. (2005). *Styles and Strategies based Instruction: a Teacher's guide*. Minnesota: Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition.
- Curtain, H., & Dahlberg, C. (2010). *Languages and Children: Making the Match, New Languages for Young Learners, Grades K-8*. New York: Pearson.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2003). *Questionnaires in Second Language Research: Construction, Administration and Processing*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Ellis, G., & Ibrahim, N. (2015). *Teaching children how to learn*. London: Delta Publishing.
- Enever, J. (2011). *ELLiE - Early Language Learning in Europe*. London: British Council.
- Farrell, T. (2008). *Reflective language teaching: From research to practice*. London: Continuum Press.
- Felder, R. M. (1996, December). Matters of Style. *ASEE Prism*, pp. 18-23, Issue 6.
- Halliwell, S. (1992). *Teaching English in the Primary Classroom*. Essex: Longman Group.
- Keefe, J. (1987). *Learning Style: Theory and Practice*. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals.

- Kirby, J. (1984). *Cognitive Strategies and Educational Performance*. New York: Academic Press.
- Mack, N., Woodsong, C., Macqueen, K., Guest, G., & Namey, E. (2011). *Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide*. Research Triangle Park: Family Health International.
- McKernan, J. (1996). *Curriculum Action Research: A Handbook of Methods and Resources*. Oxon: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Oxford, R. (2003). *Language learning styles and strategies: An Overview*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rajić, D., Šegedin, D., & Kalebić, S. (2011). An Insight into the Language Learning Styles of Croatian Elementary School EFL Learners. *Journal of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Split*, 237-253 N.º 4.
- Reid, J. (1995). *Learning Styles in the ESL/EFL Classroom*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Schroeder, C. C. (1993, September). New students - New learning styles. *Change*, pp. 21-26.
- Stahl, S. A. (1999, Fall). Different Strokes for Different Folks? A Critique of Learning Styles. *American Educator*, pp. 1-5.
- Strauss, V. (2009, 09 14). Willingham: Student "Learning Styles" Theory Is Bunk. *The Washington Post*, B2 - Education.
- Wong, L., & Nunan, D. (2011). The learning styles and strategies of effective language learners. In L. Astruc, X. Gao, U. Stickler, & L. Zhang, *System - An International Journal of Educational Technology and Applied Linguistics* (pp. 144–163, Volume 39, Issue 2). Elsevier.

Appendices

Appendix 1- Letter of consent to school

Assunto: Pedido de autorização para efectuar investigação nesta Escola, no âmbito de uma dissertação de mestrado.

Ema Freitas Florença, aluna da Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, presentemente a elaborar a sua dissertação de mestrado, pela Universidade Nova de Lisboa, vem por este meio solicitar a V. Ex^a. a autorização para contactar alunos e encarregados de educação desta Comunidade Educativa para solicitar a sua participação num estudo de investigação intitulado **"Thesignificanceofknowingpreferredlearningstyles in primaryforeignlanguagelearning"**.

Para elaboração do estudo estabeleceu-se os seguintes objectivos de investigação:

1. Desenvolver e administrar questionário sobre os diferentes tipos de "learningStyles"
2. Conversar com os alunos os resultados e ajudá-los a ver como aprendem melhor.
3. Planear actividades que abrangem todos os tipos de "learningStyles"
4. Descrever benefícios de conhecer como se gosta de aprender e de como tirar partido desse conhecimento na aprendizagem.
5. Aplicar novo questionário sobre as actividades concretizadas e avaliar a progressão dos alunos.
6. Conversar com os alunos sobre resultados

O estudo insere-se no âmbito académico, contribuindo para a realização do relatório de Mestrado, possuindo interesses pessoais e académicos. Face ao tema em estudo e ao problema a investigar, realiza-se um estudo exploratório de cariz descritivo e utilizando uma metodologia de investigação inserida no paradigma quantitativo e qualitativo.

A escolha do tema em estudo prende-se com o facto de ser uma área de investigação da qual ainda não existem muitos estudos em Portugal, o que o torna mais aliciante para o investigador.

A pertinência deste estudo prende-se, também com o facto de vir ajudar a forma como os alunos abordam a sua aprendizagem e ajudá-los a aprender melhor.

Deste modo, solicito permissão para contactar alunos, convidando-os a participar em inquéritos e actividades que procuram respostas para os objectivos propostos.

A colheita de dados será efectuada mediante questionários, observações em sala de aula e excertos do meu diário de professor.

Este estudo será efectuado mediante a aceitação de participação através de consentimento informado expresso num documento assinado por cada um dos participantes.

Desde já estabeleço o compromisso de respeitar o direito à autodeterminação, à intimidade, à confidencialidade, o direito à protecção de dados e a um tratamento justo e equitativo.

Atenciosamente, solicito deferimento

A Investigadora

Lisboa, 01 de Setembro de 2016

Appendix 2- Letter of consent to parents

Pedido de autorização aos Encarregados de Educação

Caros pais e encarregados de educação,

Chamo-me Ema Freitas Florença e é com muito gosto que irei estar com o seu educando a estagiar durante o 1º período deste ano lectivo.

Estou a fazer um Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês no 1º Ciclo na Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas na Universidade Nova, Lisboa, e o mestrado implica que durante o estágio faça um pequeno projecto de investigação. Este projecto será incluído no meu relatório final. O meu trabalho intitula-se: Qual a relevância de saber o estilo de aprendizagem preferido na aquisição duma língua estrangeira no 1º ciclo.

Venho, por este meio, solicitar a vossa autorização para poder incluir o seu educando neste projecto que vai decorrer entre Setembro e Dezembro de 2016 durante o meu estágio.

Depois de pedir autorização ao seu educando para a/o incluir no meu estudo a recolha de dados será efectuada mediante questionários, fichas de trabalho, observações em sala de aula e excertos do meu diário de professor. A qualquer momento o seu educando pode escolher não participar. As informações obtidas serão referidas no meu relatório final de mestrado e eventualmente em artigos académicos e conferências.

A instituição e todos os seus funcionários e as crianças permanecerão anónimos em qualquer circunstância.

Se tiver questões a colocar agradeço que me contactem pessoalmente através da professora titular de turma.

Agradeço que dê autorização para que o seu educando possa participar no meu estudo. Peço que entreguem esta autorização assinada até ao dia 26 de Setembro.

Oeiras, 13 de Setembro de 2016
Ema Freitas Florença

Professora Doutora Sandie Mourão
Orientadora de Estágio
FCSH, Universidade Nova Lisboa



Eu, _____

Encarregado de educação de _____

Declaro que fui informado(a) dos objectivos do projecto intitulado “**Qual a relevância de saber o estilo de aprendizagem preferido na aquisição duma língua estrangeira no 1º ciclo**” e autorizo o meu educando a participar no estudo.

Data: _____

Assinatura: _____

Appendix 3- Letter of consent to children

Autorização do aluno

Leiam este documento com atenção. Podem falar com os vossos pais sobre o assunto. Caso tenham dúvidas podem perguntar-me.

Estou a fazer um Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês no 1º Ciclo para poder ensinar inglês a crianças como vocês. Para isso preciso de fazer um pequeno estudo. Um estudo é quando alguém recolhe informação sobre um assunto porque quer saber mais sobre esse assunto.

O meu estudo chama-se: *“Qual a relevância de saber o estilo de aprendizagem preferido na aquisição duma língua estrangeira no 1º ciclo?”*. Estou a fazer este estudo para saber se ao conhecermos a forma como gostamos de aprender ajuda a aprender inglês. A informação que recolho fará parte do meu relatório final de mestrado, e possivelmente de artigos e apresentações em conferências.

Gostaria de perguntar se querem fazer parte dele. Mas antes disso é importante que percebam o que vai acontecer.

Se decidires fazer parte deste estudo e os teus pais derem permissão, irei te pedir para:

- Preencher um questionário
- Preencher algumas fichas de atividade relacionadas com o estudo
- Ficar com registo fotográfico de algumas fichas de atividades feitas por ti
- Conversar sobre os resultados dos questionários e saber as vossas opiniões

Este estudo pode te ajudar a conhecer a forma como aprendes melhor e usar esse conhecimento para melhorar a tua aprendizagem.

Se em algum momento durante este estudo te sentires cansado ou aborrecido e não quiseres continuar as atividades, basta dizeres-me que queres parar.

A tua participação não é obrigatória, nem conta para avaliação. Só farás parte se assim o quiseres, ninguém ficará aborrecido contigo se decidires não participar.

O teu nome e a tua imagem não serão usados ou vistos em nenhuma parte do meu trabalho.

Achas que me podes ajudar e fazer parte do meu estudo?



Usa um lápis de cor à tua escolha e pinta a cara que corresponde à tua resposta:



SIM, eu aceito participar



NÃO, eu não aceito participar

Nome do aluno _____

Assinatura do aluno: _____ Ano/Turma: _____

Data: _____

Appendix 4 – Learning style questionnaire

Como é que eu gosto de aprender?



Todos gostamos de aprender de formas diferentes, alguns gostam de ver, outros de ouvir, outros de fazer; existem ainda os que gostam de trabalhar sozinhos ou os que preferem trabalhar em grupo. E tu, como é que gostas de aprender?

Decide se concordas, concordas mais ou ☺ menos, discordas mais ou menos ou discordas e escolhe a carinha indicada pondo um X.

Concordo ☺ Concordo mais ou menos Discordo mais ou menos ☹ Discordo ☹

	☺	☺	☹	☹
1. Gosto mais de ler instruções do que ouvir a professora explicar.				
2. Entendo melhor os assuntos quando participo em representações				
3. Aprendo melhor se repito as palavras que estou a aprender.				
4. Lembro-me melhor dos assuntos se estudar só.				
5. Aprendo melhor quando estudo em grupo.				
6. Faço muitos rabiscos/desenhos durante a aula.				
7. Aprendo melhor quando tiro apontamentos.				
8. Gosto de ouvir a professora explicar o que tenho de fazer.				
9. Aprendo melhor se trabalhar sozinho.				
10. Gosto de fazer trabalhos de grupo.				
11. Ver mapas, desenhos e figuras ajuda-me a aprender.				
12. Consigo me concentrar melhor se petiscar enquanto estudo.				
13. Gosto de ouvir música quando estou a estudar.				
14. Gosto de estudar sozinho.				
15. Gosto de estudar com os meus colegas ou os meus pais.				

